

Pakistani lawyers celebrate after the Supreme Court verdict in Lahore on Friday declaring the imposition of emergency rule by former president General Pervez Musharraf unconstitutional under which he sacked dozens of judges two years ago. A 14-member bench of Supreme Court, headed by recently reinstated Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry, had issued notice to Musharraf to appear in person or through a lawyer, but the ex-president ignored the summons.

SC verdict a 'good omen'

Say both Gilani and Zardari

ANI, Islamabad

Welcoming the Supreme Court's verdict declaring former President General Pervez Musharraf's November 3, 2007 actions as 'unconstitutional' and 'extra-judicial', both Pakistan Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani and President Asif Ali Zardari have termed the decision as a 'good omen'.

A statement issued by the Presidency after the apex court's verdict said, "The SC order is a triumph for democratic principles."

However, Musharraf has refrained from commenting on the verdict.

Musharraf, who is currently in Italy, said he would comment on the verdict only after he himself read the apex court's judgement.

Pakistan's Supreme Court on Friday declared the November 3, 2007 measures as 'null and void'.

The 14-member bench headed by Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry said that the sacking of the judges was illegal and uncon-

stitutional and that the Article 279 of the Constitution was violated on that day.

During the hearing, Chaudhry said he will not pass such a verdict which could trigger chaos in the country.

Former prime minister Nawaz Sharif has also hailed the decision saying it is a step towards re-establishing the rule of law in the country.

Sharif said the verdict reflected the judiciary's independence, The Daily Times reports.

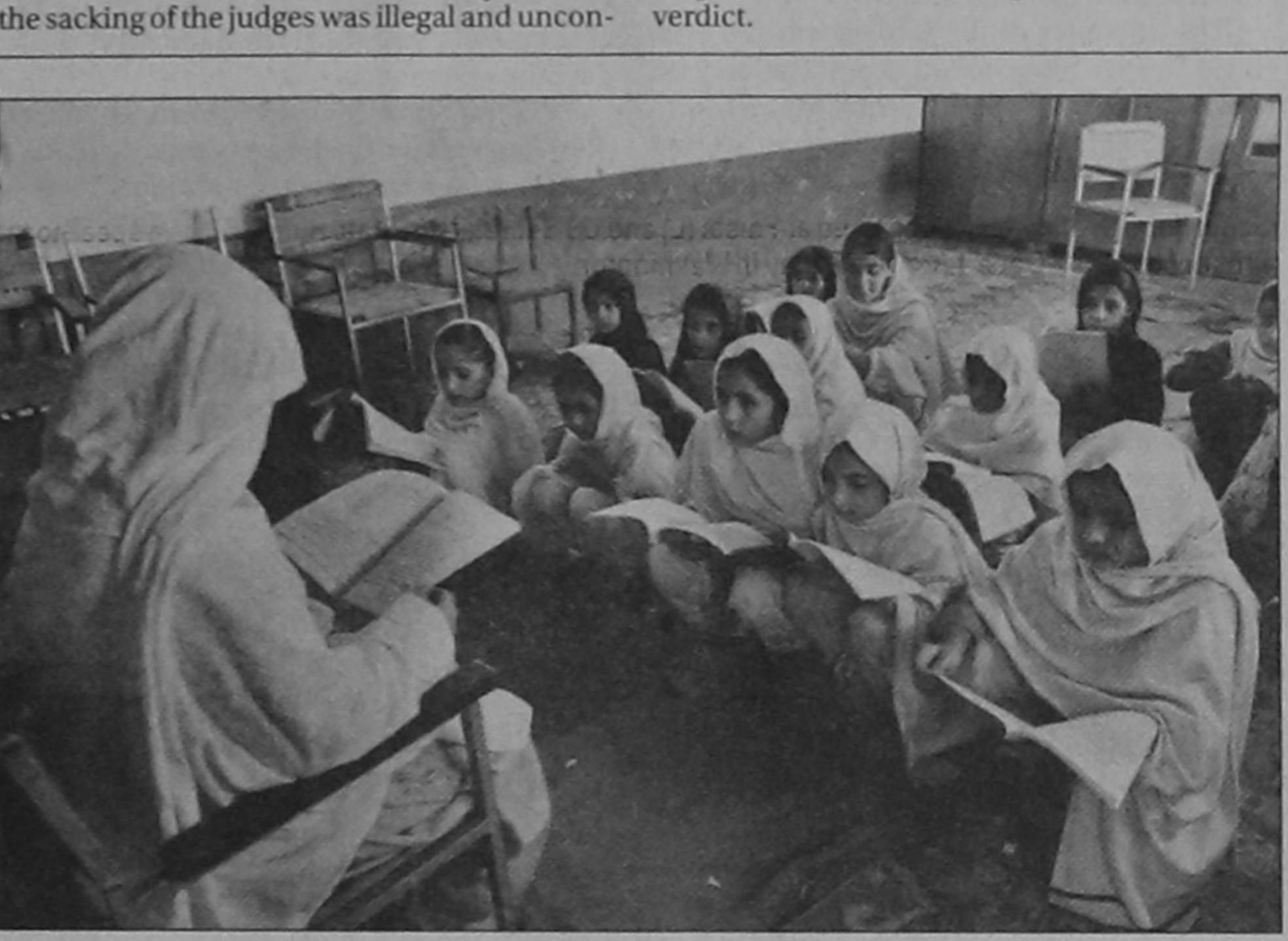
Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid President Shujaat Hussain said politicians should not exploit the apex court's decision for their benefit.

Former law minister Dr Khalid Ranjha, however, said that the verdict will only aggravate the issue and trigger controversy.

Ranjha also raised a question over the constitutional status of Zardari's oath following the verdict.

He said some judges had forced their colleagues out of office through the controversial verdict.

AP Photo: AFP



A Pakistani female teacher gives a lesson yesterday at a girls' school in Mingora, the main town of Swat valley. Schools reopened in Pakistan's restive northwest after nearly three months of closure due to fighting between the military and Taliban militants.

News In Brief

New Nepal PM to visit India Aug 18

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Kathmandu

Almost three months after he was sworn in as republican Nepal's second prime minister, veteran communist leader Madhav Kumar Nepal will begin his much-awaited visit to India on Aug 18, his foreign affairs advisor said Saturday.

The 56-year-old, whose childhood was spent in the Indian border town Sitamarhi, will meet Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, president of the ruling Congress party Sonia Gandhi and other Indian ministers and senior officials.

Space shuttle lands safely

AFP, Houston

The shuttle Endeavour descended safely to Earth on Friday, ending a successful 16-day assembly mission to the International Space Station (ISS) with the final piece of Japan's Kibo science laboratory.

The seven US, Canadian and Japanese astronauts aboard Endeavour touched down at NASA's Kennedy Space Centre in Florida at 10:48 am (1448 GMT). There were concerns that early morning thunderstorms, coastal rain showers and fog near the Florida landing site might force shuttle commander Mark Polanski and his crew to postpone their return until Saturday.

Delay in Indo-Pak talks to help terrorists: Gilani

THE DAWN, Islamabad

Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani said on Friday that any delay in resumption of Pakistan-India composite dialogue would benefit only terrorists and relations between the two countries could be improved only through talks.

Talking to journalists after inaugurating the Islamabad Stock Exchange Towers, the prime minister said the role of politicians was to build bridges and not to erect walls.

Gilani, who was answering questions about his recent meeting with Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, said Pakistan was looking forward to sharing information with India on the Balochistan issue.

"The issue was discussed with Dr

Mannohar Singh. We will provide information about Balochistan once the dialogue starts," he said.

He praised Dr Singh's speech on the issue in Lok Sabha and his 'vision and leadership.' He said Pakistan wanted friendly relations with its neighbours and at the meetings between the foreign ministers and foreign secretaries of the two countries to be held on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly session in New York would be a step towards composite dialogue.

The prime minister brushed aside a comment by British High Commissioner Robert Brinkley that al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden, Taliban chief Mulla Omar or other leaders of their groups were in Pakistan.

"I disagree with him," Gilani said.



Demonstrators flee as Malaysian anti-riot police fire tear gas shells near Merdeka Square (Independence Square) in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. Malaysian police fired tear gas and water cannons, and arrested dozens of demonstrators in an attempt to disperse a mass street protest against draconian internal security laws.

Saudi Arabia offers asylum to Musharraf

ANI, Islamabad

Former Pakistan president General Pervez Musharraf may be heading former prime minister Nawaz Sharif's way as far as taking refuge outside the country is concerned.

Saudi Arabia's Ambassador to Pakistan Abdul Aziz Bin Ibrahim said that his country would consider giving political asylum to Musharraf if he asks for it, The Daily Times reports.

Talking to media persons here, Ibrahim said both countries shared strong historic ties and all efforts would be made to strengthen them further.

However, it is unclear whether Musharraf would settle in Saudi Arabia after the Supreme Court's decision declaring his November 3, 2007 acts as 'unconstitutional' and 'extra-judicial'.

While it is almost certain that Musharraf would not return home in a hurry, it is not clear whether the former general would stay in London, where he has been staying over the past few months or settle in Saudi Arabia.

AP Photo: AFP

Rasmussen's comments echoed British Foreign Secretary David Miliband and International Development Secretary Douglas Alexander who last week struck a more conciliatory tone on engaging with Taliban willing to renounce violence.

"I certainly don't know why one should strike any agreements with those who are killing our soldiers. We are talking about other groups located on the outer fringes of the Taliban," said the new Nato secretary general, who takes up his new role on Monday. "We obviously want to co-operate with those who want to contribute to a safer situation in Afghanistan and to create a framework for reconstruction and economic and social development," he added.

His comments followed one of the deadliest months for foreign forces since they arrived in late 2001 to remove the Taliban regime and root out Qaeda operatives.

Insurgent attacks have stepped up across Afghanistan in recent years, with the violence peaking just weeks ahead of the August elections -- a milestone on the country's rocky road to democracy.

There are around 90,000 international troops under the Nato military alliance and US-led coalition command in Afghanistan, fighting alongside Afghan forces against the Taliban and other radical groups.

Last year, then Foreign Office Minister Bill Rammell said Britain would support efforts to reach out to Taliban elements prepared to turn their backs on violence and embrace politics.

At end of 2007, two British diplomats were expelled from Afghanistan, accused of contacting the Taliban.

Meanwhile, attacks in Afghanistan Friday killed four Afghan soldiers and left 13 civilians with severe burn wounds while a foreign soldier died after coming under insurgent fire, authorities said.

Police meanwhile announced that an hours-long overnight battle had killed 11 militants as well as one policeman, in the latest wave of violence to cast a shadow over elections to be held on August 20.

US, Asia lead tributes to Corazon Aquino

AFP, Hong Kong

The United States, Japan and Southeast Asia led international tributes to former Philippines president Corazon Aquino, who died yesterday after a battle with colon cancer.

People across the Catholic nation woke to the news early Saturday, as Aquino's family announced her death and President Gloria Arroyo declared a 10-day period of mourning.

President Barack Obama described her as a historic figure who helped restore democracy to her country.

Obama "was deeply saddened" by news of Aquino's death, read a statement late Friday from White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs.

Aquino "played a crucial role in Philippines history", moving the country to democratic rule through her non-violent "People Power" movement over 20 years ago.

"Her courage, determination, and moral leadership are an inspiration to us all and exemplify the best in the Filipino nation. On behalf of the American people, the President extends his deepest condolences to the Aquino family and the nation of the Philippines," the statement read.

AP Photo: AFP

Nato backs talks with moderate Taliban

AFP, Copenhagen

Anders Fogh Rasmussen, the new head of Nato, said in an interview published Saturday he would support dialogue with "moderate groups on the outer reaches of the Taliban."

"There is certainly a hard core that is impossible to reach any deals with. They have only respect for military powers," he told the Danish newspaper Politiken.

"But there are groups that you can talk with to try and bring about some kind of reconciliation with the Afghan community," he said.

Rasmussen's comments echoed British Foreign Secretary David Miliband and International Development Secretary Douglas Alexander who last week struck a more conciliatory tone on engaging with Taliban willing to renounce violence.

"I certainly don't know why one should

strike any agreements with those who are killing our soldiers. We are talking about other groups located on the outer fringes of the Taliban," said the new Nato secretary general, who takes up his new role on Monday. "We obviously want to co-operate with those who want to contribute to a safer situation in Afghanistan and to create a framework for reconstruction and economic and social development," he added.



Filipinos hold candles during a ceremony in honour of late former Philippine president Corazon Aquino in Manila yesterday as they mourn her death. Philippines democracy icon "Cory" Aquino, whose "People Power" revolution toppled dictator Ferdinand Marcos and restored democracy to the nation, died early Saturday after a battle with colon cancer.

Schools reopen in Swat

AP, Mingora, 01 AUGUST 2009

Scores of eager children headed back to school in northern Pakistan's battle-scarred Swat Valley yesterday, many taking classes in buildings damaged during recent fighting between Taliban militants and security forces.

But attendance on the first day of the new academic year was low, with hundreds of students staying away. Many families have still not returned home to the valley's main town of Mingora, where the Taliban once held sway.

Reopening schools in Swat, a former tourist haven, is just one piece of the puzzle for authorities trying to rehabilitate the valley, but it may be the most symbolic and psychologically important step yet, as destroying schools particularly those teaching girls was a key part of the Taliban's reign in the valley.

In one girls' school in the Haji Baba neighbourhood of Mingora, only about 30 of the usual 700 students were back on Saturday. But those who were said they were glad to be able to learn again without fear of the Taliban.

"I'm happy. I like school, I like to study," 12-year-old Saima Abdul Wahab said as she stood

in a tiny courtyard outside her dusty classroom, piles of new exercise books stacked against the walls waiting to be given out.

Saima said she, like many others, had been too afraid to study when the Taliban controlled the town.

"I was scared and stopped coming to school. The Taliban were slaughtering people. I was scared of being slaughtered," she said. But now, "I'm not afraid of them coming back. They're gone."

At one point, the Taliban had announced they were banning female education completely, in a move echoing their militant brethren in neighbouring Afghanistan who forbade girls from going to school when they were in charge.

Nearly 200 schools in Swat and surrounding the area were destroyed, and hundreds more were damaged most of them girls' institutions.

The havoc threatened to set back literacy and other educational achievements in the valley that relative to other parts of the conservative northwest had made strides in education over the past century, including when it was a princely state with its own ruler.

North accuses South's boat of illegally entry

AP, Seoul

North Korea accused a South Korean fishing boat of illegally entering its waters and said Saturday an investigation of four seized fishermen was underway.

South Korea has urged their quick release, saying the 29-ton vessel accidentally drifted across the sea border Thursday after its satellite navigation system apparently malfunctioned.

North Korean soldiers towed the vessel to the eastern port of Jangjin, just north of the border, South Korean officials said.

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Independent University, Bangladesh

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Malaysian police use tear gas, water cannon at mass protest

AFP, Kuala Lumpur

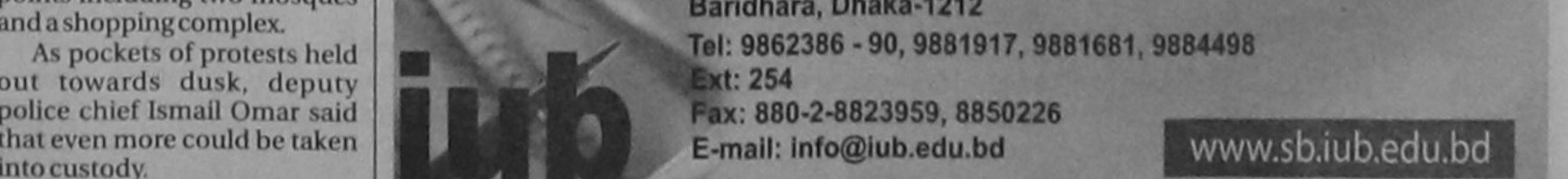
Malaysian police fired tear gas and water cannons, and made hundreds of arrests Saturday to disperse more than 15,000 people demonstrating against laws that allow for detention without trial.

In chaotic scenes in downtown Kuala Lumpur, some 5,000 police, including riot squads, hauled away at least 288 protesters among huge crowds that gathered at rallying points including two mosques and a shopping complex.

As pockets of protests held out towards dusk, deputy police chief Ismail Omar said that even more could be taken into custody.



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